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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 001594

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GR](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE IS PREPARED TO VETO MACEDONIA NATO
MEMBERSHIP

REF: A) ATHENS 1315 B) ATHENS 1316

Classified By: CHARGE TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: With elections widely expected in late September, GOG officials and undeclared political candidates are raising the bar for Macedonia's NATO entry. Distancing themselves from the 1995 Interim Accord, Greece sees the 2008 NATO decision on enlargement as powerful leverage to force Skopje to compromise on the name issue. Officials note that, even should the GOG decide to approve Macedonia's entry as FYROM, there is no guarantee that the Greek Parliament will approve it. Contacts with both the GOG and the GOM's Athens-based representatives suggest that both sides are looking for an "America ex machina" to solve this problem for them. Our goal: to prevent pre-electoral rhetoric that becomes a self-fulfilling veto, and to lay the groundwork for a productive round of negotiations under UN mediator Nimetz in the run-up to NATO's decision.

END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Since the spring, GOG officials hve debated intensely what Mcedonia's NATO entry means for Greece. A yea ago, GOG focus on its relationship with Macedoia was near-dormant; most of the center-right New Democracy government wouldn't touch the stalemate with a barge pole. That has now changed. With a decision on invitations to the A-3 countries necessary prior to the April 2008 NATO Summit, Greek officials believe they have leverage over Skopje on an issue of powerful domestic neuralgia: Macedonia's name.

GOG DOUBTS VALUE OF INTERM ACCORD . . .

13. (C) The Greek public, and many politicians, have never been fully satisfied with the 1995 Interim Accord, which provide for Macedonia's entry into international bodies as FYROM as long as a bilateral solution to the name dispute with Greece has not been reached. In the twelve years since, progressive recognition of Macedonia by major powers (including the U.S.) has devalued the agreement in Greek eyes. In their view, the Accords have made Macedonia the gradual winner of the recognition game, and Greece the eventual -- perhaps inevitable -- loser. UN negotiations between the two have proceeded fitfully; the last exchange of proposals, in 2005, left the ND government (rightly or wrongly) feeling badly used and vulnerable.

. . . AS ELECTIONS APPROACH

14. (C) PM Karamanlis -- who MUST call elections by March 2008, and is expected to hold them in late September 2007 -- has a fine appreciation for the possible impact on ND's political future. (We have no influence on the PM's decision, but -- strictly from the perspective of the name -- we should prefer September/October. An election in late 2007/early 2008 would mean Greek election rhetoric overlaps

with NATO's decision.) Karamanlis has not forgotten that infighting over Macedonia's name brought down the 1993 ND government of PM Mitsotakis. Recent polls put ND's lead over opposition PASOK at a slim 1-3%. Even if his lead over the left holds, Karamanlis has to watch out for challengers on the right: the strongly nationalist LAOS party. Based in northern Greece, LAOS can and will use the Macedonia name issue to appeal to its base. For LAOS, gaining sufficient votes to enter parliament would be a major victory, and could cut a Karamanlis majority to a single seat. Clearly, every vote counts. No wonder Karamanlis has begun reminding voters of his roots, claiming he, too, is from (Greek) Macedonia.

BUILDING THE CASE FILE FOR MACEDONIAN NON-COMPLIANCE

15. (C) Actions by the Macedonian government over the past few months have not helped. The renaming of Skopje airport in December after Alexander the Great provoked reactions from the ND government as well as other political parties. Since then, every statement by any Macedonian official has been scrutinized, dissected and, in most cases, responded to. Our MFA colleagues have expanded their talking points and evidence (even when some of their exhibits are no longer in use in Macedonia itself). The GOG is building a case file with one message: Skopje is not living up to its part of the Interim Accord, though the GOG cannot point to violations of specific Articles.

16. (C) In these circumstances, the temptation for the GOG to use NATO expansion as leverage over Skopje is overwhelming. The difficulty is determining -- and limiting -- exactly what the GOG expects to get from Skopje in return. The answers to this question are diffuse and opaque. Some have suggested that the re-naming of "Alexander the Great" airport would be a key step forward. However, FM Bakoyannis has also pressed U/S Burns and others for USG assistance in moving toward overall resolution of the name issue. She contends that Greece has moved 80% of the way towards solution; it is up to the GOM to move the remaining 20%.

17. (C) Another key question is exactly HOW the GOG expects to use its leverage. High-ranking officials have urged us to engage with the GOM to lower the rhetoric. We have agreed to be helpful while urging dialogue between the GOG and GOM. But the GOG's passive resistant response suggests they have no strategy to shape action that would avoid an eventual collision with the rest of their NATO allies. In fact, contacts with both GOG and GOM representatives here in Athens suggest the reverse: that both sides are looking for an "America ex machina" to solve this problem for them. This attitude is shared by the average (NATO-skeptic) Greek. Their rationale: By recognizing Macedonia, (the 90th state to do so) super-power America tipped the scales away from a resolution of the name issue in Greece's favor. As a result, the U.S. has a special responsibility to fix the problem.

IT'S NOT LEGAL, IT'S POLITICAL

18. (C) While the Interim Accord includes a one-year procedure for formal withdrawal, the GOG is unlikely to follow it. As one GOG insider told us, this is no longer a legal issue, but a political one. Both PM Karamanlis and FM Bakoyannis have distanced themselves from the Interim Accord, noting that even if the GOG agreed to let Macedonia enter NATO as FYROM, the Greek Parliament could refuse to ratify. Whether pre-election rhetoric or not, these statements could easily become self-fulfilling. Candidates are running hard, in the heat of summer, for every vote. If ND emerges with a one-seat majority, it may find the Parliament hard to control -- even if the GOG decided to approve Macedonia's NATO accession as FYROM. The result would place Macedonia's NATO entry in limbo. Karamanlis may calculate that he would get more -- both from Skopje and domestically -- from an outright veto than by bucking the decision to Parliament.

NOT A BLUFF, BUT NOT A STRATEGY EITHER

19. (C) Is Karamanlis bluffing? Is he trying to prompt U.S.

engagement, and concessions from Skopje, in a crucial pre-election period with no real intention of later vetoing Macedonia's NATO entry? We think not. He genuinely sees the NATO decision as the last real chance to force a compromise solution, rather than accept a gradual but definite victory for Skopje. We don't believe Karamanlis (or anyone in the GOG) has gamed out the potential scenarios. His escalating public tone (and genuine passion privately) suggest that even if he has not decided yet, his approach will leave him no possibility for retreat. The Karamanlis legacy rests on him; he cannot lose face without losing electability. Both he and Bakoyiannis have told us privately that their historical legacies will depend upon avoiding a Greek "defeat" on this issue. If it comes down to his -- and ND's -- future or Macedonia's NATO entry, Karamanlis will protect himself.

NIMETZ PROCESS KEY

¶10. (C) Embassy Athens has two immediate goals. First, we want GOG officials to recognize that, while the U.S. will engage with the GOM, they must also do so. The GOG cannot and should not depend on the U.S. to solve this for them. In addition, we will urge leaders of both political parties to avoid rhetoric that removes their post-election flexibility. Resolution of this issue will depend on the GOG's ability to engage in a productive new round of negotiations on the name issue with the GOM under the auspices of UN negotiator Nimetz.

¶11. (C) Septel will report in more detail on the GOG's expectations of the U.S. and the friendly counsel we should provide here.
COUNTRYMAN